

Pence and Pompeo address Christian pro-Israel summit

July 10, 2019

WASHINGTON (RNS)—Vice President Mike Pence and U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo both addressed a Christian pro-Israel group July 8, lifting up the U.S. ally as a bastion of inclusivity and railing against Iran.

Pence and Pompeo delivered their remarks at the annual summit of Christians United for Israel, a conservative Christian organization led by John Hagee, founding pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio. Christians United for Israel claims more than 6 million members.

Both politicians used the opportunity to defend the administration and champion what they argued were President Trump's successes.

Pence fires back at AOC

Pence spoke first, taking time to push back against recent comments by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez comparing detention facilities used to house undocumented immigrants to concentration camps.

"To compare the humane work of the dedicated men and women of Customs and Border Protection with the horrors of the Holocaust is an outrage," Pence said. "This slander was an insult to the 6 million killed in the Holocaust, and it should be condemned by every American of every political party everywhere."

Pence also framed the United States' support for Israel in theological terms.

"We stand with Israel because we cherish that ancient promise that

Americans have always cherished throughout our

Anti-Zionism equated with anti-Semitism



The Dome of the Rock and Jerusalem's Old City is seen from the Mount of Olives. President Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and instructed the State Department to begin the multi-year process of moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy city. (AP Photo via RNS/Oded Balilty)

The vice president was followed later in the day by Pompeo, who, like Pence, championed the Trump administration's various actions on Israel, such as recognizing Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights and moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.

"Thank God we have a leader in President Trump and an immovable friend like Israel," he said, adding that his own job as secretary of state is "to turn

that commitment into real action.”

Pompeo also condemned anti-Semitism and echoed other speakers at the conference by arguing that “anti-Zionism is indeed anti-Semitism. Period. Full stop.”

Similarly, he said the Trump administration had put the United Nations “on notice” for what he called “anti-Israel bias.”

As Pompeo closed, the crowd rose to its feet in a standing ovation.

Pence and Pompeo’s religious references resonated with Garmon Smith, a summit attendee from Oklahoma.

“They both are strong Christian men, and they receive what the Bible has to say about blessing Israel,” he said.

Marylin Henretty, who said she got to know Pence and his wife before he became the governor of Indiana, also lauded the appeals to Scripture.

“Mike has always shown up at all the events supporting Israel. What he’s saying we have heard many times,” she said. “We believe what the Bible says concerning Israel. To have a president openly professing that the land belongs to Israel—that’s what Scripture says.”

Injustices against Palestinians

In a guest opinion article published by Religion News Service, a rabbi and a Protestant minister offered a significantly different view.



More than 60 Palestinian protesters died and about 2,700 were injured in demonstrations along the Israel-Gaza border. (Screen Capture from Australian Broadcasting Corporation, courtesy of BP)

Lynn Gottlieb, board chair of the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity and member of the Rabbinic Council of Jewish Voice for Peace, and Graylan Hagler, senior pastor of Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Washington, D.C. and director of Faith Strategies, said organizations such as Christians United for Israel and the policies the group promotes “pose a grave danger to the safety and well-being of both Jews and Palestinians.”

“How can a political and theological agenda refuse to see the humanity, sacredness, and suffering in the other and yet still claim to be religious?” they asked.

“This is what CUFI does. It supports Israel at all cost, without question or criticism, while ignoring the great injustices against Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories based upon the anti-Semitic theological/political idea that Jews must be restored to ‘their homeland’ in order for the Second Coming of Jesus to occur.

“As clergy and people of deep faith and conscience, we do not know a God

that ignores or justifies the suffering of one group of people for the security and comfort of others. We do not know a God that justifies in any form or fashion the oppression and subjugation of others. We call on Americans of all beliefs to stand in support of Palestinians struggling for their long-denied freedom and against the kind of dangerous pseudo-religious extremism that CUFI represents.”